

MEMORANDUM

To: The Accountability and Autonomy Work Group
Date: Wednesday, May 21, 2014
Subject: Accountability Practices in Massachusetts and Louisiana

Brief History of the Accountability Movement

One of the key early moments of the K-12 “accountability movement” occurred in 1989, when President George H. W. Bush attended the National Governors Association’s “Education Summit” in Charlottesville, Virginia. At this meeting, President Bush, state governors, and business leaders discussed how they could translate the lessons of accountability from other fields into the public education sector. They concluded that systemic reform would require alignment between academic goals, curricula, instruction, and exams.

In the years that followed, “accountability” in education became synonymous with standards (what students should know and be able to do in each grade and subject level) and assessments (measures of student acquisition of those standards). The 1994 reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, titled Goals 2000, required states to develop and adopt standards and assessments.

When ESEA was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, it reiterated the requirement that states adopt standards and assessments but took accountability one step further by requiring interventions for poorly performing schools. States and districts were required to implement escalating measures each year a school failed to make adequate progress toward 100 percent proficiency—culminating after five years in “school restructuring.” The term “accountability” now typically refers not only to standards and assessments but also to interventions in underperforming schools.

By the early 2010s, NCLB reauthorization was several years overdue and a vast number of schools were on the verge of required restructuring. In response, the U.S. Department of Education invited states to apply for waivers from the NCLB requirements—conditioned on state implementation of several federal priorities. These waivers have fueled state adoption of new educator evaluation systems, Common Core State Standards, one of two Common Core-aligned assessment consortia, and tiered interventions for states’ lowest performing schools, termed “focus” and “priority” schools.

What follows are summaries of the current accountability policies in Massachusetts and Louisiana. Massachusetts was one of the earliest adopters of accountability and has routinely been among the top-performing states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Louisiana’s Recovery School District (RSD) is one of the most aggressive strategies for

intervening in persistently underperforming schools and has shown success in school improvement.

Accountability in Massachusetts

Massachusetts has a long history of school accountability, which started with the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993. Under MERA, Massachusetts implemented a state-wide accountability system for schools and districts.

MERA made extensive changes to the state's education system: it overhauled school funding formulas and created new curriculum frameworks and standards for learning. It also established accountability. First, MERA made all schools accountable through transparency. The Massachusetts Department of Education (MDOE) began publishing annual performance information for every school, reflecting performance and growth on state assessments among other non-academic measures.

Second, it gave the State Board of Education (SBOE) the power to develop tools to identify and intervene in underperforming schools and districts. Schools deemed "underperforming" were required to complete a diagnostic analysis with the Department of Education and submit a detailed plan for improvement. Those that failed to improve were subject to a state takeover, in which a Commissioner-appointed receiver replaced the district superintendent.

Since the passage of the MERA and revisions to the state accountability system necessitated by NCLB, Massachusetts' students have made steady gains on NAEP and hold one of the highest positions among the 50 states. The state also scores as well as the top-performing countries on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Massachusetts' accountability system has evolved over the last two decades, particularly in how school and district performance is evaluated. However, the broad strokes of the 1993 MERA remain in place today.

School and District Evaluation

Massachusetts' current accountability system, under the ESEA waiver, classifies schools into one of five "levels." Districts are typically placed into the same level as their lowest-performing school. Depending on their designated level, schools and districts are required by the state to implement a variety of interventions.

Progress and Performance Index (PPI)

- PPI is a measure for schools, districts, and student subgroups on seven core indicators: narrowing proficiency gaps (ELA, math, science); growth (ELA, math); dropout rate, and cohort graduation rate.
- Groups are awarded 0, 25, 50, 75, or 100 points based on improvement with a 75 considered to be "on target."
- Annual PPI is calculated by dividing the sum of the points earned for all indicators by the number of core indicators that apply to a given school.

Two input measures are used to identify Level-1 and Level-2 schools, those on the high end of school performance: A Progress and Performance Index (or “PPI”, see sidebar) and participation rates on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

- Level-1 schools have a PPI above 75 and an MCAS participation rate of 95 percent or higher; and
- Level-2 schools have a PPI below 74 and MCAS participation rates between 90 and 94.9 percent but do not otherwise meet the criteria for Levels 3-5.

Progress and Performance Index (PPI)

- PPI is a measure of improvement and progress toward goals for schools, districts, and subgroups on seven core indicators: narrowing proficiency gaps (ELA, math, science); growth (ELA, math); dropout rate, cohort graduation rate.
- Groups are awarded 0, 25, 50, 75, or 100 points based on improvement with a 75 considered to be “on target.”
- Annual PPI is calculated by dividing the sum of the points earned for all indicators by the number of core indicators.

Level 3 schools, classified as “focus” schools under Massachusetts’ ESEA waiver, are those that meet any of the following criteria:

- The school’s PPI is in the 20th percentile or lower relative to other schools serving the same or similar grades;
- One or more student subgroups has a PPI in the 20th percentile or lower relative to all subgroups within the state;
- The school’s four- or five-year cohort graduation rate is less than 60 percent; or
- The school’s MCAS participation is below 90 percent overall or for any subgroup.

Schools that meet the criteria for Level 3 may be eligible for placement in Level 4. The Commissioner of Education has the authority to place schools in Level 4 but must consider additional measures, including academic performance and growth over a four year period, the percentage of students scoring in the very lowest levels of performance on MCAS, trends on graduation and/or dropout rates, and attendance and discipline data.

Level-4 schools are required to implement a three-year turnaround plan (described below). Schools that fail to improve under the three-year turnaround plan may be placed in Level 5. Taken together, Level-4 and -5 schools represent the state’s “priority” schools under its ESEA waiver and represent the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in the state.

State Interventions

Level-3 Schools and Districts

State intervention in underperforming schools starts with Level 3 (focus) schools. Districts and schools in Level 3 are required to implement targeted strategies for school improvement and can also receive additional support from the state:

- Required to complete the state-developed self-evaluation tools to identify school and district deficiencies in the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* (see sidebar) and to revise the school and district improvement plans to address those deficiencies;

- Required use of 20 percent of their Title I, Part A funding on targeted interventions for the lowest-achieving students in their lowest-performing schools;
- Required to direct IDEA funding to grant programs for improvement programs for students with disabilities in these schools/districts (at the discretion of the SBOE); and
- Optional support from one of six regional District and School Assistance Centers (DSAC), including consulting to support implementation of an accelerated improvement plan.

Level-4 Schools and Districts

Schools designated as Level 4 are priority schools and are required to develop and implement a turnaround plan that addresses the *Conditions for School Effectiveness* and conforms to the federal turnaround principles.¹ The school, district, and MDOE collaborate in developing the plan, which must:

- Include benchmarks by which to measure progress toward the annual goals included in the plan and a timetable for achieving those benchmarks;
- Include descriptions of the assistance to be provided by the Department in support of the action steps in the plan; and
- Be prepared in the format provided by the Department.

Conditions for School Effectiveness

- Effective district systems for school support and intervention
- Effective school leadership
- Aligned curriculum
- Effective instruction
- Balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments
- Principal's staffing authority
- Professional development and structures for collaboration
- Tiered instruction and adequate learning time
- Healthy school environment
- Family-school engagement
- Strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority

The MDOE has the authority to define the school's annual measurable goals, assess the plan's fidelity to the federal turnaround principles, and provide targeted assistance through tools, templates, and/or external providers. The MDOE may also choose to appoint personnel to support and monitor the implementation of the turnaround plan, including a team to conduct site visits to the district or the school.

Turnaround plans may grant superintendents in Level 4 districts additional powers to help low-performing schools.² Superintendents may:

- Expand, alter, or replace the curriculum or program offerings;
- Reallocate school funding;
- Provide additional funds from the district budget;

¹ The federal turnaround principles include: strong leadership, effective teachers, redesigned schedules for additional instructional time, rigorous and aligned instructional programs, use of data for continuous improvement, safety and health of students, and family and community engagement.

² Note that Massachusetts law requires a significant level of review before a school turnaround plan can be approved, which includes both consultation with a committee of stakeholders and an appeals process for the local school committee and teachers union. The process and its timeline are written into statute and allow for as many as 200 days for the completion and final approval of a turnaround plan.

- Provide funds, subject to appropriation and union approval, to increase the salary of administrators or teachers, to hire or retain high-quality teachers, or to reward educators that work in low performing schools and achieve annual performance goals;
- Expand the school day or year;
- Add pre-k or full day kindergarten to elementary schools;
- Following union consultation, require all administrators, teachers, and staff to reapply for their positions within the school with the superintendent given full discretion over hiring decisions;
- Limit, suspend, or change provisions of collective bargaining agreements, provided that salaries are not reduced with a commensurate reduction in hours worked; and
- Limit, suspend, or change district policies or practices.

A superintendent also has the option to appoint a receiver to assist in the implementation of support and turnaround plans for Level-4 schools.

A Level-4 district is also required to create a plan to accelerate improvement within the district and strengthen support for its lowest performing schools. District plans must include goals and benchmarks that address the specific reasons it was designated as Level 4, including strategies, action steps, and a timetable for achieving those goals and benchmarks. Specifically, the district must:

- Clearly describe what its approach will be to result in rapid, systemic change in its Level-4 schools within three years;
- Provide a description of the district's redesign and planning process;
- Describe how the district will recruit, screen, and select any external providers;
- Describe the district's systems and processes for ongoing, support and monitoring of implementation;
- Describe which district policies and practices currently exist that may promote or serve as barriers to the implementation of the proposed plans and the actions they have taken or will take to address them;
- Describe how the district will ensure that the identified school(s) receive ongoing, intensive support from the state, district or external partner organizations;
- Describe how the district will monitor the implementation and success of the selected intervention at each identified school.

Level-5 Schools and Districts

At the conclusion of a Level-4 school's three-year turnaround plan, the Commissioner evaluates the school and may determine that:

- The school has improved and is no longer underperforming, at which point the school is exited from Level 4;
- The school has improved but remains underperforming, at which point the superintendent may renew the turnaround plan or create a new plan for an additional turnaround period of no more than three years;
- The school has not improved and is chronically underperforming.

If the Commissioner determines that the school is chronically underperforming, the school and its district may be designated as Level 5 (priority). In this case, the Commissioner may execute a state takeover by appointing an external receiver to replace the district superintendent. A receiver must have a demonstrated record of improving low-performing schools and may be an individual or a nonprofit entity.

The receiver, who has all of the powers of the school superintendent, is then responsible for implementing a revised school turnaround plan and is accountable to the Commissioner for meeting the goals of the plan. The Commissioner may terminate the receiver and appoint a new receiver, but not before the first full year the school operates under the turnaround plan.

Accountability for Individuals

Teachers in Massachusetts are evaluated on an annual basis by a principal or other supervisor. While local school committees each establish their own teacher evaluation systems, they must conform to numerous principles outlined in state regulations and are subject to MDOE review. In particular, teacher evaluations must include both measures of practice and measures of student growth, though state laws and regulations do not specify the weighting between the two:

- A teacher's practice is based on classroom observations, artifacts of instruction, contribution to professional culture, and student feedback. Teachers are rated as Exemplary, Proficient, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory.
- A teacher's impact on student growth is calculated using MCAS data, where available, and at least one other district-wide measure of achievement. Teacher impact is rated as High, Moderate, or Low.

Any teacher receiving a rating of Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory and any teacher who receives an impact measure of "Low" is given a one-year improvement plan with specific goals for practice and student growth. Teachers who do not meet these goals may be dismissed. While tenured teachers have a long process of arbitration in Level 1-3 schools, the timeline is reduced to a maximum of 33 days for tenured teachers in Level 4 and 5 schools. In addition, as listed above, the superintendent may require all staff to reapply for their positions in a Level 4 school as part of the school's turnaround plan.

Principals in Massachusetts are required to be employed through individual employment contracts with their districts, which must include numerous principles outlined in state regulations. An initial contract may range from one to three years, and subsequent contracts may range from three to five years.

While principal evaluations must be written into each individual employment contract, principal evaluations in Massachusetts are similar to those for teachers in that each district may develop its own system. Principals are also evaluated partially on their practice and partially on measures of student growth.

A superintendent may dismiss a school principal in any school, but it must be for good cause and is also subject to an arbitration process. The superintendent or receiver may also dismiss a principal in a Level 4 or 5 school by requiring all staff to reapply for their positions as part of the school's turnaround plan.

Superintendents in Massachusetts are primarily accountable to their local school committees, which have the power to hire and fire them. Contracts are not required to include performance objectives or evaluations but are limited to a maximum of six years. Superintendents may also be held accountable by the Commissioner, who has the authority to place a Level-5 school and district in receivership and remove the superintendent from district leadership.

Accountability in Louisiana

School and District Evaluation

Each school in Louisiana receives a letter grade based on an annual School Performance Score, ranging from 0 to 150. This score is calculated differently based on the grade levels served by a school:

- SPS for schools serving only grades K-7 is calculated based 100 percent on assessment scores;
- SPS for schools serving grades K-8 is calculated based 95 percent on assessment scores and 5 percent based on a dropout/credit recovery index;
- SPS for schools serving grade 12 is calculated based 25 percent on assessments, 25 percent on the ACT, 25 percent on a graduation index, and 25 percent on graduation rate; and
- SPS for schools serving a combination of K-8 and 9-12 grades will be calculated using a weighted average.

Grade Calculation:	
SPS/DPS	Grade
100-150	A
85-99.9	B
70-84.9	C
50-69.9	D
0-49.9	F

Schools are also eligible for “bonus points” to their SPS if they have at least 10 students in the non-proficient subgroup and a minimum of 30 percent of them meet or exceed their expected growth.

A school's SPS is translated into an “A” through “F” score (see table). A school that earns between 50 and 84.9 points (a “C” or “D” school) is required to participate in intensive coaching from the State Department of Education on the Common Core State Standards and the state's teacher and principal evaluation system, COMPASS. A school that earns less than 50 out of 150 points (an “F”) is deemed “Academically Unacceptable.” These schools (along with any school with a graduation rate below 60 percent) are designated as focus schools under Louisiana's ESEA waiver.

Similar to the school evaluation process, districts receive a District Performance Score, calculated similarly to the SPS but aggregating all students in the district. This DPS is also translated into a corresponding letter grade. The state then publishes a report card for each district that includes its District Performance Score, letter grade, and a subgroup component that takes into consideration test participation and annual measurable objects for student subgroups. Transparency, in combination with public perception, helps drive district accountability.

The state can take more active steps to intervene in a district if the district has more than 30 Academically Underperforming Schools or if more than 50 percent of students attend an Academically Underperforming School. In this case, the district may be deemed “Academically in Crisis.” When a district is notified that it is “Academically in Crisis,” the state requires the

board of education to select an approved Certified Public Accountant to conduct an audit of the finances and the financial policies and practices of the school district. The state also gains additional authority to transfer the district's schools to the Recovery School District (RSD) discussed below.

The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has the authority to intervene when an Academically Unacceptable School (AUS) or a school in a district that is "Academically in Crisis" meets certain criteria. These schools are transferred to the RSD and become Louisiana's priority schools under its ESEA waiver. There are four ways for an AUS to be transferred to the RSD, three of which require the recommendation of the State Superintendent and the approval of BESE, and one of which is automatic:

- First, if, during its first three years as an AUS, a school does not submit and comply with an acceptable plan to address deficiencies, BESE may transfer the school to the RSD.
- Second, when a school is deemed an AUS for four consecutive years, BESE may transfer the school to the RSD regardless of an LEA's plan for improvement.
- Third, a school that has received a "D" or an "F" for three consecutive years may be transferred to the RSD if a petition is signed by a majority of parents and approved by BESE.³
- Fourth, a school is *automatically* transferred to the RSD by operation of law if it has an SPS below the state average, is in an LEA that has been deemed "Academically in Crisis," and if any other school in the LEA is eligible for transfer to the RSD.

State Interventions

When a school is designated as an AUS, or focus school, it is required to take a number of actions to address its deficiencies.

- Provide parents with the option of enrolling their children in higher-performing schools in the district;
- Analyze extensive data, including student subgroup performance, student subgroup graduation rates, and educator effectiveness data, and conduct a needs assessment to identify specific areas of deficiency;
- Be placed in a cohort of districts with similar needs and receive intensive support from a state "network team" of five to seven individuals;
- Optional use of additional resources from the Department of Education, including best practices identified through the RSD (discussed below), toolkits and webinars, and qualified external partners.

In order for a school to be transferred to the RSD and become a priority school, the State Superintendent must recommend transfer to BESE. The recommendation must include performance objectives for the school and the method in which the school will be operated by the RSD. There are five options for how the RSD can operate a school:

- The school is run directly by the RSD;
- The school is converted to a charter school;
- The school is operated as a university partnership school;
- The school is operated under a management agreement with a third-party provider; or

³ A parent petition may also be used to transfer an RSD-operated school back to the local school board if it receives a "D" or "F" for five consecutive years.

- The school enters into a Conditional Supervisory Memorandum of Understanding, under which the LEA continues to operate the school but is under the direct supervision of the RSD.

BESE has final decision-making authority over whether a school will be transferred to the RSD and the method of operating the school.

In the case of RSD schools that have been converted to charters, the RSD's relationship with the charter school is primarily one of accountability and oversight. Each RSD charter school enters into a performance compact, which lays out the expectations for student growth and performance. An initial charter contract typically lasts five years. After the initial term, if a charter school meets its performance objectives, it may be renewed for an additional five year term. If the school has not met its performance objectives, it may be closed.

The RSD supports all schools in the implementation of the federal turnaround principles, but the support differs depending on whether the school is directly run by the RSD or converted to a charter school.

It is important to note that there are only 15 schools directly operated by the RSD and, in 2013, RSD superintendent Patrick Dobard announced that he would phase out schools directly operated by the RSD by September 2014—*making the RSD the first all-charter district in the country.*

Turnaround Principle	RSD-Direct Operation	RSD-Converted Charter
Providing Strong Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leader has the authority to make all staffing decisions, under the oversight of the RSD. • School leader receives support from its RSD “network team” to set goals, assess performance, give teachers and principals feedback, manage and provide professional development, and create ongoing cycles of improvement that link goals, data, and coaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leader has the authority to make all staffing and budgetary decisions at the school level, under the oversight of its board. • May request support from the RSD “network team.”
Ensuring Effective Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not participate in collective bargaining agreements. • Staffing decisions can be based solely on teacher performance and effectiveness. • All teachers are observed at least four times per year and data is used to inform staffing decisions, as well as inform professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May choose to participate in a collective bargaining agreement. • Staffing decisions can be based solely on teacher performance and effectiveness.
Redesigning Learning Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate for 179 days per year (2 more than required by state law) and have a longer school day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have autonomy to set their school calendars, as long as they meet state minimum requirements.

Strengthening Instructional Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a curriculum developed by RSD content experts, including recommended activities that are to be taught and aligned RSD resources. • Implement Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy to frequently measure student progress and adapt instruction and interventions accordingly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held to high accountability standards for student performance results, in conjunction with increased freedom for school leaders to develop or choose curriculum.
Using Data to Inform Instruction and Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network teams work with principals to review student data to inform personnel and instructional decisions. • Network staff participates in meetings of teachers every week to review student data to analyze progress to inform instructional decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RSD provides data analysis on an individual school basis.
Establishing Positive, Safe, and Supportive Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in program called School-Wide Positive Behavior Support, which teaches and reinforces positive behavior and uses data to help identify problem behaviors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can request support from Network Team.
Providing Mechanisms for the Engagement of Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates four family resource centers across the state where families can get information about all RSD schools. • Partners with community organizations to hold meetings and events. • Individual schools may implement additional engagement efforts. 	

Accountability for Individuals

Teachers in Louisiana are accountable for their students' academic progress. They receive annual evaluations from a principal, assistant principal, or other supervisor. Fifty percent of a teacher's evaluation is based on student growth and the other 50 percent is based on a minimum of two classroom observations (four observations for RSD-operated priority schools). If a teacher is determined to be ineffective, he will first participate in an intensive assistance program for no longer than two years. If the teacher does not complete the program or is not evaluated as effective after the program is completed, the local board of education is required to begin termination proceedings. In addition, principals and superintendents are required to use effectiveness as the primary criteria for employment decisions and are prohibited from using tenure or seniority as the primary criteria.

Administrators in Louisiana are accountable for their students' academic progress. They receive annual evaluations from the district's chief academic officer, superintendent, or other supervisor. Similar to the evaluation of teachers, 50 percent of an administrator's evaluation is based on a school-wide growth measure and the other 50 percent is based on a qualitative site visit to the school. Administrators that are deemed ineffective participate in an intensive assistance program for no longer than two years. If an administrator does not complete the program or is

not evaluated as effective after the program is completed, the local board of education is required to begin termination proceedings.

State law requires that a local superintendent be employed by the local school board through a written contract that includes specific performance objectives. However, state law further stipulates contract elements for districts that receive a "C", "D" or "F" on the District Performance Scores. In these districts, superintendent contracts must include performance targets for : (1) student achievement; (2) student achievement for schools that have received any variation of a school performance letter grade designation of "C", "D", or "F"; (3) graduation rates; (4) graduation rates for schools that have received any variation of a school performance letter grade designation of "C", "D", or "F"; and (5) the percentage of teachers with an "effective" or "highly effective" performance rating. In the case that the superintendent does not meet the performance targets, state law requires that the superintendent be removed from office.

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